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ABSTRACT

The desire for students to understand and respect each other is a primary motivation for the effort to integrate multicultural education into all aspects of the Anchorage School District (Alaska) curriculum. The Anchorage curriculum emphasizes the cultural heritage of Alaska Natives, other resident ethnic groups and Pacific Rim cultures. In recent years, this emphasis broadened to include a more international focus. At the elementary grades, the intercultural curriculum is for the most part integrated into the social studies and language arts programs. In the secondary grades, the program emphasizes particular courses and programs. The Bilingual and Multicultural Education Programs also involve students through a variety of programs and activities. The University of Alaska and Alaska Pacific University offer district-sponsored credit courses in bilingual education, intercultural education, and Native education for interested teachers. Result of a needs assessment of minority secondary students (n=246) show that prejudice, racism, and intercultural communication are not major concerns. Academic achievement, planning for future college and career, and developing personal relations predominate. The survey supports maintaining the effort to integrate cultural information into the existing curriculum rather than attempting to introduce cultural education as a separate entity. The integration of intercultural issues, materials, and instructional methods is an ongoing process that has support from the community, school board, and school district administration. (Author/KS)

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INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION:
The Anchorage Alaska Experience

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INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION:

The Anchorage Alaska Experience

ABSTRACT

The desire for students to understand and respect each other is a primary motivation for the effort to integrate multicultural education into all aspects of the Anchorage School District curriculum. The assumption which underlies the desire to encourage intercultural education is that understanding and tolerance improve intercultural relations and interpersonal communication.

The Anchorage curriculum has emphasized the cultural heritage of Alaska Natives, other resident ethnic groups and Pacific Rim cultures. In recent years, this emphasis has broadened to include a more international focus At the elementary grades, the intercultural curriculum is for the most part integrated into the social studies and language arts programs. In the secondary grades, the program emphasizes particular courses and programs. The Bilingual and Multicultural Education Programs also involve students through a variety of programs and activities. The University of Alaska and Alaska Pacific University offer District sponsored credit courses in bilingual education, intercultural education, and Native education for interested teachers.

The results of a needs assessment of minority secondary students is reported along with current efforts to infuse cultural materials into various curriculum areas are discussed. The integration of intercultural issues, materials, and instructional methods is identified as an ongoing process which has support from the community, school board, and school district administration.

Introduction

It is natural that Anchorage and Alaska place a great emphasis on international and intercultural education and communication. In part, this is due to the unique historical role of Alaska as a Russian colony in North America. In part, this is due to the unique location of Alaska as the Western most state of the United States with natural trading partners in Russia, Asia, and the Pacific Basin. In part, this is due to the diverse cultural heritage of Alaska where the dominant population groups are Alaska Native and American Indian for most of the state..

The geographic characteristics of Alaska make it stand out from other states in the United States. Some of the most obvious are that it reaches into the Arctic, is North and West of Canada, is East and the Soviet Union, and has a land mass which equals more than one-third of the continental United States. The unique social characteristics of Alaska may be less obvious.

In the period since World War II, Alaska has seen its population more than double to just over 500,000. Alaska has become a major exporter of oil and a major transit point for air travelers and goods moving between Europe and the Orient. The Alaska boarder with the Soviet Union has opened reuniting Eskimo families and regular air passanger service is planned to start between Anchorage and Provadenia this summer. Air cargo service has been in operation for the past six months.

Anchorage has a population of over 247,000 with one of the 100 largest school districts in the United States. There is a student enrollment of over 41,500. One student in four, more than 10,000 students, are members of ethnic minority groups. Current projections indicate that by the year 2,000 there will be one minority student for each Caucasian student in the Anchorage schools (Holthouse, 1990).

The fastest growing and largest minority group of students in Anchorage are Alaska Natives and American Indians. In part the growth in numbers in this group is due to a high and increasing birth rate which is increasing the Native population throughout Alaska. In part it is due to a migration of families from rural areas who seek to enjoy the economic and cultural opportunities of Anchorage.

The second largest minority group is made up of Black students. Black parents often come to Anchorage through the military and stay to seek economic opportunity.. The third largest ethnic minority, Asians and Pacific Islanders. This group has grown at a rate close to 5% a year reflecting national immigration trends and growing Alaska job opportunities in transportation and service industries.

The unique location of Alaska, increased numbers of minority students, and the growing international ties and business opportunities have encouraged a growing emphasis on international and intercultural in Anchorage. There has also been a growing frustration with the overall ability of the education system to hold the interest of students resulting in higher dropout rates for minority than majority students.

Table 1 shows that while few students drop out of school in Anchorage, Alaska Natives and American Indians are more than twice as likely to leave school prior to graduation than White students. Prior research with Native dropouts has indicated that a greater inclusion of materials felt to be relevant by students would reduce the number who fail to complete high school (Fenton and Crum 1983, 1984) and college (Salisbury, 1971).

Table 1
Anchorage School District
Minority Student Dropouts
1988-89

Year	American Natives	Asian/ Pacific	Black	Hispanic	White	Total
Enrollment	3,956	2,385	3,581	1,254	32,623	43,799
Dropouts	264	47	96	40	799	1,246
Dropout %	6.7%	2.0%	2.7%	3.2%	2.5%	2.8%

The responsability for developing a curriculum which will interest students restus with the Curriculum and Assessment Department. This department is charged with the review and approval of all instructional materials used in the Anchorage schools Departmental guidelines indicate that materials are reviewed for content, subject matter, physical format, organization, readability, writing criteria, and social fairness. Social fairness criteria were developed to assure that materials selected for use in the schools would avoid any stereotypical, negative or biased information on any cultural or social group. Materials are reviewed for linguistic bias, stereotypes, erroneous group representation, and the numerical representation of members of the groups. Stress is placed on avoiding slurs, sexist terms, sexist titles, stereotypical representation of occupational roles, personality traits, physical characteristics, and under representation of any group.

The development of an increased inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, and inter-national emphasis does not always come easily. There have been false starts, disagreements about curriculum content and emphasis, and disputes about how new cultural materials may be added in the time available for presenting materials. In one case an Alaska Native Studies Unit which was carefully prepared over a two year period created an unanticipated backlash of prejudice which revealed that few teachers are prepared to deal with ethnic tension and racist comments in the classroom (Fenton and Nancarrow, 1986).

A survey was conducted in early 1990 to assess the interests of minority students and to help in planning curriculum needs. This paper presents the results of this survey and then goes on to briefly review Anchorage efforts to improve the curriculum and provide materials which will interest students and improve intercultural relations.

The Greatest Concerns of Minority Students

A survey was conducted in January, 1990 of minority students enrolled in Anchorage secondary schools, grades 9 through 12. The surveys were mailed to the homes of of a sample 1,050 students. Completed surveys were returned by 246 students, a return rate of approximately 23%. The respondents proved to be a good cross section of the secondary minority student community though the American Indian and Alaska Native groups were slightly under represented in the return. Twenty-five percent, 25%, were American Indian and Alaska Native, 32% were Black, 12% were Hispanic, and the remaining 32% were Asian and Pacific Islander. Table 2 presents the ten greatest concerns ranked according to the frequency which the concern was selected.

Table 2
The Ten Greatest Concerns of
Anchorage Minority Students

Issue	Rank	Percent
College Planning and Scholarships	1	66%
Career and Work Planning	2	45%
Self-Esteem and Attitudes	3	40%
Leadership and Communication Skills Development	4	38%
Dating and Interpersonal Relations	5	32%
Dealing with Prejudice and Racism	6	28%
Teen Marriage, Parenting, Children	7	23%
Drugs and Peer Pressure	8	23%
Intercultural Communication	9	21%
Interracial Dating and Marriage	10	19%

Students were presented with 10 issues which had been developed from "focus" group discussions with minority students at each of the 7 Anchorage senior high schools. The survey asked to indicate if they felt that there should be an increased emphasis on the topic. Students were also presented with the opportunity to write into the survey those things which they felt were problems they faced in school.

Students made comments on a variety of issues related to achievement and improving academic achievement. For some students the issue was failing grades or doing well enough in classes to pass and gain the required credits for graduation. For more students the issue is getting high enough grades to get into college or college preparation classes. Some reported that it was difficult to convince advisors that they could do the work that required for advanced and college preparation classes. Time management and the ability to balance work, school activities, and academic performance appear to be a problems for many junior and senior students.

Racism, prejudice, and a feeling of separateness or lack of acceptance appear only as a passing issues. Ten times as many comments were made about grades and four times as many were made about interpersonal communication with teachers, parents, and friends than about problems which arose from prejudice. However, concerns with self-image, racism, and inter-racial relations still effect 20% or more of the group

For the most part, the concerns of minority students are consistent with the concerns of all students. Academic achievement, planning for future college and career, and developing personal relations, self-attitude, and interpersonal skills predominate. While some communication related areas such as leadership and intercultural communication are not now treated within the Anchorage curriculum. The survey generally was taken as support of maintaining the effort to integrate cultural information into the existing curriculum rather than attempting to introduce cultural education as a seperate area.

The Anchorage Goal: Integration of Cultural Education

The original effort to integrate cultural information into the curriculum took place in the Social Sciences. The Anchorage Social Studies Curriculum is described in a two volume thousand page Scope and Sequence which covers K - 12 objectives in history, geography, economics, sociology, psychology, and human values. The elementary curriculum blends the various subject areas of the social sciences into common themes which are used to organize instruction at each grade. The themes expand from personal relationships within the family in the early grades through an emphasis on the community during the middle grades to a concern with national and inter-national issues at the upper elementary grades. Junior high students are exposed to "exploratory" units in the various elements of the social sciences: economics, history, anthropology and psychology. During high school there are required courses in American History, U.S. Government, and Contemporary Problems and elective courses are available in Alaska Studies, Economics, Law, Sociology, Psychology, and History.

Two major efforts are now taking place in the Social Studies area which effect what students learn. A group of second grade teachers and a Social Studies resource teacher are in the final stages of revising a second grade unit on Family and Community to include information on the Alaska Native Community. The project has taken two years and has involved advisors from the University of Alaska as well as Native parents and community leaders. The Social Studies program coordinator has been active in developing materials on geography with an emphasis on the peoples of the Pacific Rim for grades 5 and 6. In-services for teachers are now being held to assist teachers in integrating the new materials into their classes.

There is so much to be taught in the Social Studies Curriculum that teachers often feel that it is hard to cover the basics of social studies let alone take into the discussion major blocks of information on cultural groups, their contributions to Alaska and the United States, and their role in contemporary society. (Fenton, 1986; Fenton and Nancarrow, 1986).

The Role of the Indian Education Program

The Anchorage Indian Education Program provides Native students tutoring and counseling. It also supports the enhancement of the overall education program through assisting in curriculum development and providing materials related to Native culture for use by all teachers. The commitment to develop materials and curriculum for all students came from a realization by Native parents that few commercial materials are available to support instruction about Alaska Native heritage.

A major effort was undertaken during the mid-1980s to prepare and integrate into the Social Studies curriculum Alaska heritage units in grades two, four, and six. The units were developed to use examples drawn from Alaska to support the district Scope and Sequence goals. At grade two, a six week Unalakleet Unit makes use of the life and activities of the Eskimo village of Unalakleet on the Western Coast of Alaska to explore the various aspects of a community, home-school-government-work, and how they are interrelated. At grade four, the Indian cultures of the interior and coast are examined with Tlingit and Athabascan Units which stress work, subsistence harvesting, and the economics of a barter economy. The Aleut culture of the Aleutian Islands and the disastrous effects of cultural contact with Russian traders are taken up in a sixth grade unit. Each unit is supported with classroom kits of materials, films, video tapes, and teaching supplies.

In 1989-90, more than 9,500 students participated in social studies lessons on Alaska Culture sponsored by the Indian Education Program (Lamebull, 1990). Native artists and story tellers gave

demonstrations to more that 2,600 students in 40 schools. There were also two groups of teachers who participated in semester University courses in Alaska Native Education offered by Edna Lamebull, the program director.

The Indian Education Program also supported Native Emphasis Week in all Anchorage schools. School wide activities were encouraged which were related to Alaska Native culture and art as well as field trips for 2,000 students to the Anchorage Historical Museum for demonstrations of Native dance and exploration of museum exhibits. In addition, more than 200 movies, tapes, and slide shows are made available to all teachers through the Anchorage School District Audio Visual Services Department. Further, Native American artists and story tellers were made available to schools to make presentations to classes and assembly and more than 4,000 students participated.

The Role of the Multicultural Education Department

Multicultural Education was established as a separate program in 1979 to review materials for bias, recommend the acquisition of supplemental materials to support existing curriculum and to provide training for teachers and administrators. The program was expanded in the mid-1980s through the creation of a separate Multicultural Education Department with the added charge of encouraging academic achievement on the part of minority students.

The goals of the Multicultural Department stated in the program report for the 1989-90 school year are:

- to provide technical assistance to staff and students to create greater cross-cultural understanding, communication, and appreciation among students, staff and parents;

- to infuse multicultural information and cross-cultural materials into the curriculum and offer teachers courses which promote cultural awareness;

- to introduce teachers to instructional strategies proven effective in working with multicultural populations and which include materials which reflect cultural diversity and acknowledge the contribution of minority groups in the United States; and

- to expose students to artists and art forms representing a diversity of cultures (Cordova, 1990).

Activities of the Multicultural Education program include training for teachers and supervisors related to encouraging parent involvement, peace education, the use of multicultural literature, encouraging creative expression, cultural awareness, and child abuse and neglect. Staff members have played an active role on district curriculum committees. During 1988-90, staff members from all Anchorage schools and more than 7,000 students participated in training or cultural activities sponsored by the Multicultural Education Department (Cordova, 1990).

During 1989-90 the Anchorage School District Curriculum and Assessment Department completed a year long selection process for language arts materials to be used for students in grades K-8. The selection process included a review of all materials for cultural fairness and content by the Multicultural Department staff and a Fairness review committee made up of teachers and community members. While all of the materials were found to be unprejudiced in their treatment of minority cultures, they were also found to be wanting in their inclusion of cultural materials.

This resulted in a survey of Multicultural Materials in the 71 school libraries in Anchorage and the preparation of a K-9 supplemental materials list to support the language arts adoption. The Anchorage School Board set aside $100,000 dollars to purchase supplemental materials to encourage teachers and schools to increase their holdings of reading materials which would support the language arts program.

More than 5,000 students were exposed in 1989-90 to the visiting artists program sponsored by the Multicultural Education program and the Alaska State Arts Council. The program brought noted artists into the schools and sponsored art shows and dance activities. During 1989-90 there was a special emphasis on Hispanic culture with a residency by a Mexican folk dance artist at an Anchorage High School.

Role of the Bilingual Education Program

The Anchorage School District Bilingual Education program provides tutors and teachers to work with students who need assistance in improving their English communication skills. The goal of the program is to bring the English language ability of each student up to the point that all students are able to function independently in regular English speaking classrooms. All students new to Anchorage are screened on English speaking ability.

In elementary schools, tutors trained in English as a Second Language (ESL) instructional methods work with students outside of the regular classroom in an to improve language proficiency and support

academic skill development. In junior high schools, tutors and ESL teachers work with students in special High Intensive Language Training (H.I.L.T.) classes. H.I.L.T. classes seek to improve language proficiency, self-image, and achievement. In high schools, ESL trained teachers work with bilingual students in special H.I.L.T. language arts and social studies classes and provide tutoring support in other areas as necessary.

Special Korean and Japanese language centers have been opened in the past three years because of the large numbers of students who are monolingual speakers of these two languages who are now living in Anchorage. The centers concentrate the students to facilitate instruction in English by bilingual teachers who provide instruction in both the students native language and English. Both of these programs are supported by parent committees and coordinate with other community programs to provide assistance to Korean and Japanese speaking parents.

There are over 100 language groups represented in the 3,500 students currently served by the Anchorage Bilingual Education Program. The program supports culture clubs in high schools often supports the efforts of individual schools to celebrate various cultural groups through class activities, art contests, special meals, and cultural displays. Bilingual Education week is often celebrated with cultural activities, music, and dance presentations. Many Bilingual Education staff members make presentations on their own cultures when asked by teachers within the schools where they work. While it is difficult to assess the activities of the Bilingual Education staff that effect the school beyond those bilingual students with whom they work, the effects are notable.

The Dynamic of Change

In recent years, the focus of the intercultural curriculum has been expanded to more of a recognition and consideration of the international role of Alaska. A major emphasis has been in the development of Pacific Rim studies. These focus on the trading partners that are becoming more important to the Alaska economy. Some of these changes are coming into the curriculum through changes in emphasis, others are coming through changes in the nature of the curriculum.

There is a changing mix of foreign language classes in the Anchorage schools. Secondary schools have introduced courses in Russian, Japanese, and Chinese. The number of students in Russian classes had doubled in the past three years and there are now regular exchanges of students between Anchorage schools and schools in the Soviet Union. Japanese and Chinese courses are more recent additions to the curriculum and their enrollments are small, but growing. Experimental programs in Spanish and

Japanese have been introduced in two elementary schools over the past three years and their effects are only now being evaluated.

Pacific Rim studies courses have been introduced and there is an increase in the amount of geography and economics being included in existing courses. An experimental, pilot vocational education program is being introduced at the Martin Luther King Career Center to prepare students for work in international businesses.

The Impact on Students

The impact on students of the developing intercultural and international curriculum in Anchorage is hard to judge. The goal of much of the inter-ethnic and multicultural curriculum goes beyond a scholarly concern with providing an accurate reflection of our culture in the public schools. Much of the impetus of the development of multicultural units has been to make the schools a friendlier place for minority group members and to encourage the members of minority groups to higher academic achievement.

In general, the ten years since the introduction of the Multicultural Education Program and the development of lessons related to the Native peoples of Alaska has improved. Unfortunately, the level of performance for Hispanic students, Black students, and Alaska native students in Anchorage has remained below that of the average for Caucasian students and there has been little change in the relative performance of the groups on standardized measures of achievement (Stofflet, Fenton et al, 1990)..As shown in Table 1, the dropout rate for Alaska Native and American Indian students remains about twice that of Caucasian students.

The activities described her show that the Anchorage School District has a commitment of multicultural and intercultural education. The most important point may be that international education and multicultural education are not treated as a goal which can be checked off as accomplished as some certain point. International and multicultural education are treated as a process and as time passes and circumstances change the materials and methods used to instruct students are expected to change. Through the various areas described in this paper the Anchorage School District has made a commitment to a process of change with the goal of encouraging both greater knowledge and better interpersonal and group relationships.

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